

BELISARIUS.

A

TRAGEDY.

WRITTEN BY

Mr. P H I L I P S.

To which is prefixed,

Some ACCOUNT of the LIFE of

BELISARIUS.

----- *Vivite fortes,*
Fortiaque adversis opponite pectora rebus. HOR.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. STAPLES opposite Stationers-Hall.

MDCCLVIII.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

BRITISH

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Tragedy adapted from the original of the

LONDON:

Printed for J. Sturges opposite St. Dunstons Church

MDCCLXXIII

[Price one shilling]

ADVERTISEMENT.

THOUGH we presume an apology for reprinting this tragedy will be thought needless, yet we hope the following short account of the hero thereof will not be unacceptable, or thought impertinent.

Belisarius was general of the armies of the emperor Justinian, the stay of his throne, and one of the greatest captains of his age. In 529 he marched against Cabades king of the Persians, who took arms by reason of the protection which the emperor gave to Tzathus king of Colchis. This expedition was very successful to Belisarius, who was recalled to go and command the army which was to be sent to Africk. In 532, a treaty of peace was made with the Persians. In January such a sedition arose at Constantinople, that Justinian proposed to withdraw; but Belisarius dissuaded him, and the rebels were brought to their duty, tho' they had proclaimed for emperor one Hypatius, upheld by Probus and Pompeius, nephews to Anastasius. In 533, Belisarius having conducted into Africk a naval army consisting of 500 ships, took Carthage, and subdued Gilimer in 534, who had usurped the crown of the Vandals, after having caused his cousin Hilderic, son to Hunneric and Eudoxia, to be massacred. Thus Africk was re-united to the empire, after it had been separated from it more than 100 years, and the puissant monarchy of the Vandals (who were infected with the heresie) was ruined. Gilimer was taken and brought to Constantinople. Belisarius went through the city on foot to go into the Hippodromus, where Justinian expected him upon a magnificent throne, in order to receive the honours of this triumph. After so great an advantage it was resolved to deliver Italy from the tyranny of the Goths. Belisarius prepared himself for this second expedition. In 535, being consul, he passed into Sicily, where he immediately took Catana, Syracusa, Palermo, &c. and the ensuing year, he went with part of his army to besiege Naples. In the mean time the Goths had put to death king Theodatus, at the persuasion of Vitiges, who was put upon the throne. This attempt helped on the designs of Belisarius: he presented himself before the city of Rome, where he was received the 10th of December 536. The year following Vitiges came to besiege him; but he found so much resistance, that he retired in 538. Two years after, this unfortunate king was taken in the

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city of Ravenna, with his whole family; and Belisarius chose rather to carry them prisoners to Constantinople, than to receive the crown of the Goths, which was offered to him, preferring loyalty to a crown. In 541, Belisarius having been sent into the East against the Persians, wasted Assyria, as he did also in 543. In the mean while, the affairs of Italy wanted his presence; Totila was chosen king of the Goths, and after having taken Naples, Tivoli, and other considerable places, he had turned all his forces against Rome, taken it in 546, ruined its houses, demolished the walls, and plundered it during four days. The year following Belisarius threw himself into it, rebuilt its walls, and defended it. In 549, Totila retook it. In the mean time Belisarius passed into the East to oppose the Persians. In 558, he beat back the Huns that made an irruption upon the territories of the empire. They say that in 561, this great man being accused of having consented to a conspiracy against Justinian, the same emperor deprived him of all his means, took from him his employments, and pulled out his eyes. Such is the opinion of the Latin authors, who say, that Belisarius was reduced to beg in the streets of Constantinople. The author of the mixed history of Constantinople writes, that the year ensuing he was re-established in his dignities: and Cedrenus saith, that he died in peace at Constantinople. Alciat, to defend Justinian, is of opinion, against Crinitus, Volateran, and others: they assure, that Belisarius died the 13th of March, 565. Procopius, Agathias, Glycas, &c.

PROLOGUE:

Spoken by Mr. RYAN.

*SO hard the task the tragic Muse ordains,
Few find success, with all their skill and pains.
If time and place and action they observe,
From plot and character the authors swerve.
Nor these enough, shou'd even these prevail,
In noble thoughts and energy they fail.*

*Can we then please in so polite an age?
When sense and learning only fly the stage.
We only sink, and are debas'd in wit;
That you improve, we to ourselves submit,
Of judgment so exact, of taste so nice,
Nor play, nor woman can engage you thrice.*

*Not ignorant of this, with real fears,
Our author, conscious of defects, appears.
The following scenes he offers to your view,
Nor dares your censure, nor can meanly sue.
But hope not towns besieg'd, and battles fought,
And in one play ten different stories brought.
And sure the stage shou'd still be chaste and clean,
From deeds of horror, and from works obscene.
Such conduct with th' ignoble crowd obtains,
But gives you torment, and deforms the scenes.
A plain and single tale we represent,
Nor with digressions maim the chief intent,*

*Happy the man! who shall reform the stage,
Improve our judgment, and refine the age.
But humbler we raise not our thoughts so high;
To rules you dictate, chearful we comply.
Submit our labours to your just decrees,
Proud to be taught, and happy could we please.*

EPI-

EPILOGUE:

Spoken by Mrs. BRETT.

HOLD, are you mad? so I'm oblig'd to tell ye,
A famous poet once instructed Nelly. Epilogue to Ty-
rannic Love or
Royal Martyr.
Forgive, if great examples we pursue,
Weigh the respect that to the dead is due.
But we in vain to rival them pretend,
And what pleas'd then, perhaps may now offend.
These wiser times their ancestors deride,
And different maxims your behaviour guide.
Then wit could thrive without the mighty aid
Of conjurers, nor dreaded masquerade.
There was a time when love and honour sway'd,
The youth was faithful to the yielding maid.
Th' Exchange was only throng'd with plodding cits,
And lords then condescended to be wits.
We made the great for sustenance our quarry,
Nor were we forc'd for countenance---to marry.
The ladies then, tho' not so fair as you,
Therefore excepted; for if fame says true,
They liv'd, and lov'd, and did---just as you do. }
Then was the time---Hang those pedantic days,
What we ne'er imitate, why should we praise?
Yet should we praise the maxims you pursue,
You would be loth---the devil should have his due:
For so mysteriously the moderns wound,
We think they praise us, when we are lampoon'd---
Fearful our praises you should mis-conceive,
The artful theme to other pens we leave:
Dull nauseous flattery shall be suppress'd,
No laughter sought by some indecent jest.

Our

EPILOGUE.

*Our Muse with waggish Epilogue disdains,
Instead of farce, to close the tragic scenes.*

*Let others thus hunt mercenary fame,
Debase the stage, and wrong the poet's name;
We hope an audience of a juster taste,
Where vice and nonsense are alike disgrac'd.
We hope---oh may our hopes find bless'd success!
That some will mourn for virtue in distress.*

Dramatis

Dramatis Personæ.

M E N.

JUSTINIAN.	Mr. <i>Ryan.</i>
VITIGES.	Mr. <i>Diggs.</i>
BELISARIUS.	Mr. <i>Bobeme.</i>
PROCLUS.	Mr. <i>Walker.</i>
HERMOGENES.	Mr. <i>Quin.</i>
MACRO.	Mr. <i>Egleton.</i>

W O M E N.

VALERIA.	Mrs. <i>Parker.</i>
ALMIRA.	Mrs. <i>Brett.</i>

Officers, Guards, &c.

BELISARIUS.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Scene of Action is at Constantinople.

An Anti-Chamber of the Palace.

Enter Hermogenes.

HE comes, the happy Belisarius comes,
Adorn'd with conquest, and with laurel crown'd.
In golden chains kings swell the glitt'ring pomp,
And chariots bend with loads of foreign spoils.

Confusion ravages the crowded streets;
Wild uproar reigns, and discord wounds the air.
The infants strain their tender throats to cry,
The sky resounds, great Belisarius comes:
The peasant throws aside his ax and plough;
The merchant leaves to tempt the angry main;
Nor is the greedy bar litigious now.

Nor for a thankless master has he fought.
Justinian studies to repay his toils;
Valeria is design'd his great reward,
And power and honour will attend the gift.

What then, Hermogenes! remains to thee?
Obscur'd by him, my grandeur soon will fade.
For, me he hates, and scorns the tricks of courts.
The arts and wiles which purchas'd Cæsar's grace,
First favourite late, chief minister of state,
Will nought avail me, Belisarius here.

Fame has no tongue but in the victor's praise.

Then he or I must fall; both cannot stand.
The choice is easy, but the means are hard.

B

Enter

Enter Macro.

But see! my heart can entertain some joy;
Welcome, my brother! welcome to my arms!
This to the ties of blood, to friendship this.

Mac. My ever honour'd lord! brother by blood,
My friend by choice, a partner in thy care.
The rank I hold, the fortune I possess
Are owing to the wife Hermogenes.

Her. I long'd to see, to press thee to my breast.
But wherefore, Macro, hast thou left the pomp,
Forborn thy part of this triumphant day?
Thy sword (if fame deceives not my glad ears)
Hath reap'd thee laurels, and should share the praise.

Mac. Let the wild rabble roar, I fly their praise,
And with disdain I hear th' acclaiming crowd.
Me other thoughts molest, me cares oppress,
And drive me to thy friendly arms for aid.
For aid to thee I fly, thy censure dread.

Thou wilt upbraid my weakness, scorn my griefs,
Think me Justinian's foe, nay think me thine,
When in this universal rage of joy,
Thou shalt behold my face obscur'd with gloom,
And catch me smothering a broken sigh.

Her. Is Belisarius, proud of his success,
Unmindful of thy worth? he would defraud
The soldiers of their due, and haughtily
Engross the glories which their arms have gain'd.

Mac. Oh were he such! I then had room to hope.
Not the first Cæsar was in his resolves
More firm, or flew more swift to execute.
Not Fabius was more wise, more circumspect.
Never was man more lavish of his blood
In glory's hot pursuit; the conquest gain'd,
Joyful he gives the soldiers their just fame,
He shares the fame, but yields them all the spoil.
Thus just, thus wise, thus brave, thus fortunate,
Modest and temperate: yet — may I speak —

Her. Boldly.

Mac. Thus then; I envy —

Her. On.

Mac. I hate —

Her. More yet.

Mac. Detest,

B E L I S A R I U S.

3

Mac. Detest, and would to death pursue——

Her. Say, Belisarius.

Mac. You have sav'd my tongue

The shame of naming him,—— but him I hate.

Her. My brother! in thy bosom dwells my heart,

There is alliance in our minds; our blood,

Our thoughts, our wish the same: I too detest

This boasted warrior, minion to blind chance.

We will unite our forces, to the earth

Lay low this lofty pine, and from his head

Will tear the laurel which we cannot blast.——

But say, whence springs thy hate!

Mac. Why should I blush?

Of what am I ashamed? when I pursue

Great nature's urgent law; that prompts me on,

That breaks all bounds, and leaps o'er ev'ry fence.

O love! O mighty love! thee I obey,

At thy dread altars bend; thou hast defac'd

All other thoughts; my only sovereign thou!

Her. Love is the cause! a woman is concern'd!

In courts and towns luxurious, love presides.

Not the rough warrior free! not camps exempt!

Busy, alluring plague! pernicious joy!

Woman moves me too, but ambition more.——

Of that at leisure hours.—Thy story now.

Mac. I need not tell (our parent Italy,

O'er-run with Goths, a wild and numerous herd,

Contemning peace and desperate in war)

That Belisarius, blest'd in all attempts,

In triumph late return'd, Africk subdu'd.——

Her. 'Tis needless this, and irksome to my ears.

Too well I know his swift success; how soon

His fortune or his skill in arms o'erthrew

The Gothic power, which near an age prevail'd.

His magnify'd defence of Rome one year

Enclos'd with hostile troops; how thence he drove

The Gothic king, the warlike Vitiges

Back to Ravenna, his proud capital,

Forc'd him to terms, and thou the hostage sent.

Mac. Thence springs my hate, from thence my griefs arise.

Oh had I been condemn'd to toil in mines,

To exile sent, depriv'd of darling fight!

The fair Almira I had ne'er beheld,

Nor made my fame a sacrifice to love,

To fond, insulting, to desponding love.
 There I beheld thee first: caught with thy charms,
 I strove to mediate peace; rejected that,
 For Vitiges, thy father mildest terms
 Procur'd; unprofitable service found!
 The victor, Belisarius, he alone
 Was worthy thy regard. For him disdain'd,
 In vain I sought to move thy haughty mind;
 Fled I pursue, rejected I adore.

Her. And Belisarius—owns he too her power?

Mac. Who can behold, and yet resist such power?
 Oh fatal beauty! oh resistless charms!
 Guard well thy heart, fly her enchanting voice,
 Dare not to view so elegant a form,
 Avoid the lustre of her radiant eyes,
 Or in the lover I shall lose my friend.

Her. Does Belisarius then resign his heart,
 And love the daughter of the Roman foe?
 Imprudent choice! Note that Hermogenes.—
 Already I have spy'd the path which leads
 To gratify ambition and revenge.
 Not all the statesman's forecast, all his art
 Could have contriv'd a scheme so apt, to hurl
 This tow'ring Belisarius from his height,
 As chance hath careless offer'd to my thoughts.

Men may boast wisdom, it is chance invents,
 Chance gives the hint. Let it suffice, if we
 Can take the hint and form it to our use.—
 But Proclus comes—the gen'ral's favourite.

Mac. Sent to know where the pegeantry must end.
 This anti-chamber is th' appointed place.

Enter Proclus.

Her. Change we our language then and sooth his pride.
 Hail worthy Proclus! let me fold thee here,
 And shew I share the joys thy eyes divulge.

Pro. He were no friend to honour, justice, truth,
 No friend to Cæsar, or the Roman name,
 If joy dilated not his breast this day.
 Again the Roman name is great in arms,
 To heaven ascends, with former splendor shines,
 And Rome again obeys her rightful lord.

Her. When Belisarius leads, Fortune submits,

Or

Or charm'd, or aw'd, no various goddess she.
He wars secure, fated to victory,
Belov'd of heaven and deify'd by men.
Justinian delegates to him his power,
And wisely sits supine, dull business scorn'd.
The name of Cæsar justly is forgot,
'Tis Belisarius fills all mouths, all hearts.

Pro. Well, I perceive thy aim ; thou do'st propose
Invidious, to extol his name too high,
And ruin by exaggerated praise.
Thy taper dim and faint appears, expos'd
To his bright rays ; he justly holds first place
In Cæsar's breast. Repine thou Macro too,
That fair Almira hears thy love with scorn.
Combine in hate, employ the courtier's loom,
Smile, fawn, betray, use all insidious arts,
Weave fine the snare, but see the twines are strong,
Arachne's web so bars the eagle's flight.

Her. Unkind return ! unjustly you suspect :
Yet this provokes not, nor abates our love.
Should Belisarius entertain such thoughts,
'Tis decent to retire, lest we offend
His sight, and damp the universal joy.

[*Exeunt Her. and Macro.*]

Pro. I never view that face without distaste :
His looks alarm my soul, and bid beware.
Men say, the visage should no credit find—
Erroneous thought ! nature, direct and plain,
Stamps on the face the purpose of the mind.
The good or bad intentions of the heart
Work out, and on the visage are display'd.
The traitor look, which shews the traitor heart,
Is then the honest look ; fair warning gives,
And bids us not confide. If then we are
Deceiv'd, blame we our fond credulity :
Our vanity and pride enslave our reason,
And yield us captive to fallacious tongues.
But hark, the trumpets — Belisarius comes.

Enter Belisarius in triumph, &c. Vitiges and Almira.

'Tis Cæsar's will I should attend you here. [*To Belisarius.*
Plac'd on his throne, to grace your triumph more,
He will receive you with conspicuous joy.
I go, to notify your wish'd approach. [*Exit Proclus.*

Bel. I do not, Vitiges, condemn your grief,
Of power divested and in triumph led.
But blame not me; blame your malignant stars,
Your adverse fortune, fate, or what you will;
I only execute what Cæsar wills,
He bids me war, custom ordains this pomp.

Vit. I blame not you, nor of my stars complain;
Reproach and censure fall on me alone.
My brows surrounded with a diadem,
The purple from my shoulders flowing loose,
Thus regally adorn'd I should have dy'd,
In the tumultuous breach I should have fallen,
And born my honours spotless to the grave.

Bel. A brave defence of towns besieg'd, a wise
Retreat equals the conqueror's renown.

But, oh! Almira, when I view thy face
O'erspread with care, when I behold those eyes,
Those heavenly eyes, which wont to cheer my soul,
Now bent on earth and swell'd with pearly drops,
My glories I renounce, my triumph hate,
Asham'd of conquest, grievous to thy peace.
Some merit I may boast, some favours claim
For service pass'd; Justinian wise and good,
Will hear my pray'rs and will restore thy peace.

But see the door unfolds——Cæsar appears.

*Trumpets. The scene draws. Justinian on his throne.
He descends and embraces Belisarius.*

Jus. Come to my arms, to my embraces rise.
Welcome, my soldier! Atlas of my state!
More than supporter, the enlarger thou!
The happy instrument of heav'n to give
Our empire peace, and subjugate her foes.

Bel. My triumph is compleat, my joys are full,
When such reception you vouchsafe to give.
Chearful the soldier toils, undaunted fights,
Secure of recompence in Cæsar's smiles.

Jus. Be witness all, let every nation know,
From every nation thou hast purchas'd fame,
How dear, how high thou art in our esteem.
Thou scarce canst add to what I owe thy sword,
Nor canst demerit by hereafter deeds.
The impious wretch who dares infuse distrust,

Envy or jealousy in our just mind,
Pulls sure destruction on his miscreant head.

But say, my warrior! wouldst thou ought require
To shew our love, to prove our gratitude?

Bel. Encourag'd thus: allow me to present
This royal pair, objects of clemency.
This Vitiges—his lovely daughter this.
Let them not pine in sad captivity,
Assuage their sorrows and pronounce them free.

Just. Kind and benevolent are thy demands,
And but anticipate what we resolv'd.—
Be free—Be ever from this moment free.
And if there may remain to recompense
The loss of empire and of sovereign pow'r,
When Belisarius asks be gratify'd.

But to the temple let us now proceed—
Your presence is not necessary there. [*To Vitiges.*]
There shew our transports, there compleat our joy.
Imperfect is our joy 'till we have paid
Our holy off'rings at the shrine; just debt,
For gratitude, but in the will design'd,
Brings sweetest comfort to the honest mind. [*Exit Justinian.*]

Bel. Proclus, my friend—my duty calls me hence,
[*To Vitiges.*]

Will shew the palace order'd to your use.
Constantinople now can vie with Rome.
The sons of ancient Rome have oft beheld
Princes beneath their hospitable roofs,
Who sought protection and implor'd their aid.
Nor is their glory yet so far impair'd,
But still they hold a rank which princes seek;
The greatest kings to Cæsar sue for grace,
And glory still in the patrician name.
If I have power, that dignity is yours,
With affluence to live in royal state.
May this prevail to mollify your cares!
May this deface the injuries of war!
And when Almira deigns to say she loves,
Nor Goth nor Vandal shall exceed her pomp,
The gold of Africa shall pave her way,
And Asia's gems shall blaze around her head.

Alm. Whence springs the pow'r of love! whence fly his
darts!
Mysterious cause! involuntary flame!

The

The king my father conquer'd by your arms,
Victorious ever! Both in triumph led,
This should raise thoughts repugnant to soft love.
And yet I cannot hate, and when I say
I cannot hate, I then confess too much.

Bel. I cannot ask, nor can you grant too much,
When faithful honourable love demands,
And by a father authoris'd that love,
That blessing only can compleat my joys,
And in that blessing terminate my pray'rs.

Alm. A virgin's pray'r should be to guard her heart,
And spend her days in innocence and peace.
The joys of love are pompously describ'd,
She fears the tryal artless and unskill'd,
And checks the passion fatal to her rest.

The hind surveys the stream with wishing eyes;
But all around the hounds and toils descries,
Prompted by thirst; but more compell'd with fear,
She flies the taste, where danger is so near. [*Exeunt severally.*]

ACT II. SCENE I.

The Scene continues.

Enter Justinian and Belisarius.

Jus. **T**O thee the soldier's merit best is known,
To thee I give full pow'r of recompence.
The treasury shall answer thy demand,
Ample and royal be the donative.
Bravely they fought and freely we reward.

Bel. And Vitiges —

Jus. And Vitiges shall be
Declar'd patrician. Say, is there ought else?

Bel. Cæsar, too bounteous, leaves no room to ask.
My fellow soldiers' service recompens'd,
My promise giv'n to Vitiges perform'd,
Compleat my wishes and o'erpay my toyls.

Jus. Thy bounteous mind for others seeks reward,
Unmindful of thyself; but we not so.

To

To be debtors suits not our high place.
 Raise thy desires, swell thy aspiring thoughts,
 And take a gift which kings have fought in vain.

Bel. Too well I apprehend the fatal gift. [Apars.
 Already I am rais'd beyond desert,
 I seek no more, secure of Cæsar's love.

Jus. Long have I griev'd, and with paternal care
 Beheld my people vex'd and hurt by laws
 Uncertain and confus'd. I meditate
 To rectify that ill; superfluous laws
 Rescind, the dark explain, the good affirm,
 To have the whole digested and compil'd.
 Laborious task! ages to come shall reap
 The benefit, and by these pandects taught,
 Justice shall be distributed, and men
 Shall bless the work; the cares of government,
 The providence of war divert those thoughts.
 Take thou those cares; repell the barb'rous foe,
 Retrieve Rome's glory, and enlarge her bounds.

Bel. With envy men behold the rank I bear;
 Increase of pow'r will sharpen more their tongues.

Jus. Despise their pointless darts, themselves they sting.
 To strengthen yet thy title to such pow'r,
 To bring thee nearer to myself, and fix
 Thee ever there, Valeria shall be thine,
 My belov'd sister; fair too she is held,
 Taught to obey, instruct her thou to love.

Bel. Oh far am I beneath the royal dame!
 Oh let not Cæsar thus debase his blood!

Jus. Think'st thou I am unmindful of thy worth?
 Think'st thou I can forget my empire rescu'd
 (Almost o'er-whelm'd) from the insulting arms
 Of haughty Cosroës and Cavadas,
 Proud Persia's kings? or the inhumane Huns,
 A monstrous race! by thee subdu'd, dispers'd?

Then shook my throne, when Pompey and Ipatius
 (Rebellious pair!) with thirty thousand fell
 Beneath thy loyal sword.— Sicilian nymphs
 No more had sung our praise in sweetest strains,
 Had'st thou not forc'd them to new-string the lyre,
 And taught the fertile island to obey.

Who can relate? hereafter who believe
 Thy rapid conquest o'er the fiery soil
 Of Africa? in four revolving moons

Reduc'd; where the fierce Vandals were o'ercome
 In one great day; and Gilimer their king
 Thy captive made, in triumph hither brought;
 Spoils more immense and rich old Rome ne'er saw.

And now another foe, the Goths submit,
 And now another king in triumph led.

Own I these truths, and shall I not reward?

Bel. My services deserve not such reward.

I must oppose, Valeria will oppose

A state for me too high.—Almira oh!

[*Aside.*

Besides ———

Jus. No more — I will not hear thee speak

In derogation of the man I love.

Valeria knows my will; and as she ought

Approves the choice. — By my appointment, see

Enter Valeria.

She comes, prepar'd to ratify my will.

Valeria! worthy object of my care!

Ever observant of my will! receive

This grateful gift. Be in each other blest'd!

I have disclos'd the secret of thy heart,

Shewn where that beats, to save a virgin's blush;

Love oft dilates the heart, but flies the tongue,

And hates to be beheld by foreign eyes.

My presence may incense the froward boy,

Disturb your thoughts, and check your mutual joy.

[*Exit Justinian.*

Val. Brother and emperor has a double right

To claim compliance and dispose of me.

Nor is my sex, nor is my birth excuse

For disobedience to his high commands.

Bel. Be he for ever scorn'd, ever accurs'd,

Who seeks to gratify his love by force,

Or would by pow'r compell the fair to yield.

The force of arms to empire may give right,

But love is ever unconstrain'd and free.

Val. Weak sordid minds are dazzl'd by the glare

Of wealth and power; unnecessary aids,

When merit such as yours puts in her claim.

Bel. All I have done, all I aspire to do,

Are more than paid, when you vouchsafe to praise.

Val. Who can oppose virtue so manifest?

Envy

BELISARIUS.

II

Envy abash'd retires to her dark cell,
Her snakes are folded and forget to hiss.

Bel. Such enexampl'd goodness I behold
With wonder, and at awful distance blefs.

Val. He understands me not, or shuns my love. [*Aside.*]

Our sex indeed are pleas'd with sovereignty,
Proud to survey the lover trembling stand
And distant sue for grace. Perhaps my birth
Requires such forms; —but Cæsar has forbid.
You may approach and you may speak unaw'd.

Bel. Oh aid me love to speak, yet not displease! [*Aside.*]

With awe and with respect profound, I must
Approach great Cæsar's sister. You are plac'd
So high, so far above my lowly state,
I dare not give ambition so much scope.
My heart shall still be fill'd with gratitude,
And duty and obedience ever pay.

Val. What means this language? Whence is this reserve?
[*Aside.*]

Obedience, duty, gratitude, respect!
Such terms indeed become a subject's mouth.
But there remains a word, artfully shun'd,
They say comprises, nay exceeds them all.

Bel. 'Twere highest insolence to mention more.

Val. I grow alarm'd, suspicious of my shame. [*Aside.*]

The calmness of your mind well suits respect.
And cold respect is all you have to urge?

Bel. Oh grief of mind! oh my distracted soul!
Oh royal virgin! oh divinely fair!

Let not so mean an object move your wrath,
Look with compassion down on my hard fate!
Neglect this heart! — Could I with loss of life —

Val. Talk not of life, too well I understand.

Have I debas'd my birth, disgrac'd my sex,
And meanly su'd to have my heart receiv'd?
Thankless to me! perverse to Cæsar's will!

I vainly thought my birth this distance caus'd;
And what is pride believ'd humility.

Artless, I thought the gift would be more priz'd,

The value more increas'd, granted unfought:

And so it would, in noble gen'rous minds.

Insolent man flies when we meanly sue,

And with contempt rewards our proffer'd love.

Bel. 'Tis not my will, 'tis my unhappy fate—

Val. 'Tis fate or fortune causes all our woes.
Proud, partial man ne'er owns himself in fault,
But heav'n arraigns for punishment deserv'd.
Sure I have sinn'd beyond the common course,
Subjected to Indignity like this.

And yet in this I merit not reproach :
I pay obedience to the sov'reign power.

Bel. Your dread displeasure is my deepest grief,
And makes me curse the triumphs of this day.

Val. Triumphs you curse attended with a gift
So mean, as scorn'd Valeria — down my heart !
Nor was the triumph of the day compleat,
'Till she was number'd in the captive train,
The wages of the war. — But ere the day
Be yet consum'd, Valeria may find means
To shew a just resentment of such pride,
Scorn in her turn and be implor'd in vain.

Bel. I fear to speak, lest I shou'd more offend—
Would you vouchsafe to hear—Oh love assist.

[*Aside.*

Val. Hear what! to have the injury increas'd,
And told in formal speech I am despis'd.
No, I will hear no more—leave me—away—
And with thee take each tender thought—begone.

[*Exit Bel. bowing.*

True he is gone, but foul disgrace remains,
Shame and confusion, with the slighted maid—
Shame and confusion!—Oh wou'd that were all !
A stronger passion rages in my heart.

Perhaps I drove him hence too soon?—oh no !
In his demeanour, in his eyes I read
Careless indifference, cold neglect and hate.
Coldness, neglect and hate I could have born,
Had I not been mis-led to own my love —
Oh anxious thought ! torture ! to be refus'd !
The peasant, slave, the poor, the old wou'd rage
At such return, to have their passion scorn'd.
Can I be calm ? first princess of this world !
Justinian's sister ! in my pride of bloom !——

'Tis false ; I am some beggar's spurious brat,
Old and deform'd, and odious to the sight.——
Oh I could tear my hair, beat this fond breast,
Summon the furies to inhabit there,
Expel this love, and aid me in revenge.——
Revenge ! alas ! so punish me in him.

The

The sudden anger of my sex blown o'er,
The native tenderness returns. And love
Smiles at my threats, and dares my rage. Fierce man
May rage and give his baleful passion scope,
And execute his wrath with fire and sword.
Poor, feeble, injur'd woman knows no arms,
Seeks no redress, but by submissive pray'r,
And only hopes for ease in tears and sighs.—

Enter Hermogenes.

Flow then ye tears! fly my expanded breast,
Ye throbbing sighs! attendants of my shame.

Her. Valeria weeping! unexpected sight!
Forgive me, madam, if your slave presumes
To ask the cause, and wonder at your grief.

Val. What have I done? I publish my disgrace,
Betray my weakness by unwary grief.

[*Aside.*]

Whatever is the cause, unfeign'd true grief
Loves solitude, and hates to be beheld.

I would be private now.—Retire—yet stay.

'Tis a vain thought to have the cause conceal'd.

Perhaps my weakness or—perhaps his pride—

Perhaps—alas! too sure it will be known.

Hermogenes is wise, and may assist.

[*Aside.*]

Say I should tell thee whence my sorrows rise,
Would'st thou then aid, at least conceal the cause?

Her. Can such a blessing be reserv'd for me,
To aid divine Valeria in distress?

Val. Not me alone, the emperor is serv'd,
Justinian righted in redressing me.

In me the majesty of Rome is mock'd;

My sex, my birth, all join to claim revenge.

Revenge on him, whose blood, devoid of heat,

Beats low, and freezes when I own my love.—

Oh my unbridled tongue! but who so wise

To say enough and not too much? I aim'd

To shew my anger, and I slide to love.

What need I more? my thoughts stand all expos'd;

If thou art wise, if brave, advise, redress.

Her. Honour'd with Cæsar's confidence, I guess

Your grief. I stand astonish'd and amaz'd,

That Belisarius from such beauty flies,

And to Almira blindly yields his heart.

Val.

Val. What! does he love? oh aggravating ill!
 Were he averse, insensible to love,
 I could forgive his cold neglect of me.
 To have another in my wrong preferr'd,
 Adds to my shame and grief; and woman's pride
 Improves my anger, and inflames me more.

And yields he sudden to a foreign love?
 Mine was of elder date. Ungrateful he
 To all advances decency would allow!
 My gentle sighs were vain; in vain my eyes
 Threw tender glances; careless he beheld—
 Alas! my eyes shot feeble pointless darts,
 Barren of love, fruitful alone of tears.

Give way my grief! let rage possess my heart!
 Point thou the way to right this slighted heart:

Her. He stands a tow'ring height, his basis firm—
 And yet he might be taught—if you approve.

Val. Oh! doubt not me, be sure I shall assent.

Her. True, he's my friend, my benefactor he.

Val. And what the emperor, and what am I?

Her. From me the method may seem strange and harsh.

Val. Not harsh, not too severe.

Her. So it may seem.

Yet that I am his friend, his faithful friend,
 Will best appear should you pursue my scheme.
 So weak the mind of man, nor good nor ill
 When in extremes is born with fortitude.
 Thro' long prosperity he has forgot
 Or chance or fate, both servilely obey.
 He must be taught that he is mortal.

Val. How!

Her. Subject at least to change. That wealth and pow'r
 By fortune are dispos'd, not the reward
 Of merit ever. Soon the gain is lost
 Of long, laborious, ignominious years.
 He merits all that Cæsar can bestow,
 Yet some affliction teaches to be wise;
 So shall he learn obedience to your will,
 And own your beauty, as your pow'r, supreme.

Val. You politicians love to speak in terms
 Obscure, perplex'd.—Declare at what you aim.

Her. Suppose him now, on this triumphant day,
 His laurels green, elated with success,
 Suppose him suddenly displac'd, disgrac'd.

Val.

Val. Displac'd! disgrac'd!

Her. His mass of treasure seiz'd,
 Reduc'd to want, and mark'd with infamy.
 No common punishment or grief will move
 His haughty mind. — Judge how I prize your peace,
 When thus I sacrifice the man I love,
 My friend, my dearest friend, to give you ease.

Val. I know not how to give consent.

Her. Your pow'r

Is absolute o'er Cæsar's will! 'tis kind
 To check his pride, and stop some wild designs.

Val. The world will tax us with ingratitude.

Her. The world! alas! the world can ne'er judge right,
 Compos'd of knaves and fools. Who would restrain
 Their appetites for popular applause?
 Or bear a moment's pain, to gratify
 The wild, the thoughtless, the ignoble herd?
 Mark Belisarius, by the giddy crowd
 Ador'd, pursu'd with deafning peals of joy;
 His praises yet suspended in the air,
 The sound of grateful tribute to his worth
 Not yet extinct: divest him but of pow'r,
 Of Cæsar's love, that clam'rous rout with joy
 Would shout his fall, and hiss him to the grave.

Val. Love he with-holds with Cæsar's favour grac'd;
 For injuries, tho' short, will he not hate?

Her. His fall divulg'd, to me he has recourse,
 His bosom-friend. I shew his pride, neglect,
 His insolence, ingratitude——(forbear
 To frown, a friend must always be sincere.)
 Point out the happy way to be redress'd,
 And ere 'tis night, I throw me at your feet,
 And humbly sue to have his love receiv'd.

Val. True, the temptation's strong; and yet I fear—

Her. This method cannot fail, 'tis easy, plain.

Val. Well if I can prevail——

Her. Of that no doubt.

Val. I go—You must impart Justinian's will.

Her. Obedient ever.— [She going and returning.

Val. And in gentlest terms——

Her. I wound myself when I displease my friend.

Val. In private speak, it may afflict too much
 To publish his disgrace.

Her. Confide in me.

Val.

Val. Distasteful is my task, perplex'd my fate !
To win his love, I counterfeit my hate.
I dread the means which to my aid I call,
And with reluctant joy behold his fall. [Exit Valeria.

Her. And when a great man falls—rise when he can.
Honour once soil'd, the lustre ne'er returns.
This exceeds hope—Chance is my goddess still !
In gentlest terms, in private speak—no doubt.
Ha, ha, ha.

Credulous, easy, thoughtless sex ! good tools,
Fit instruments to ruin and destroy,
Guided by skilful and judicious heads.
Left to themselves, like frigates under sail,
Goodly to see, without the pilot's care
They drive on sands, or bulge upon the rocks.

The woman gain'd, the man's destruction follows.
To make it surer, Vitiges must join ;
The heavy, surly Goth, by Grecian wiles
Defrauded, no Augean task, shall aid,
And make revenge compleat, and fix my pow'r.
Seated on high, secure I will look down
And view the ocean cover'd with the wreck.
Pleas'd with the storm, deride my sinking foe,
And hear the surges vainly dash below. [Exit.

ACT III. SCENE I.

The Scene continues.

Enter Hermogenes and Macro.

Her. **H**Ast thou inform'd the Goth of my desire ?

Mac. You are obey'd ; expect him soon.

Her. 'Tis well.

Then, Belisarius, dread thy fate. To be
Displac'd is not enough ; a petty ill.
Thy vigour may cast off the winter slough,
And with fresh beauty in the spring appear.
I must pursue the blow. Benum'd and cold
The adder I will seize, and crush him dead.

Mac. Now, my Hermogenes ! now shew thy love,

And

And make me blest'd. Justinian has declar'd
That Belisarius shall Valeria wed,
To thee no doubt well known. The news dilates
My heart, and I partake the gen'ral joy.

Her. And whence thy joy?

Mac. Almira may be mine,
Wouldst thou confirm the emperor's resolves,
And influence Vitiges to give consent.
How the thought charms! then wert thou kind indeed.
Then, Belisarius, glut thyself with pow'r;
Let Europe, Afric, Asia sound thy fame,
No envy stings my breast, Almira mine.

Her. 'Tis strange, must folly still adhere to love!

Mac. Let folly, madness, want or plagues attend,
Love I pursue, my guide, my aim, my prize.

Her. Away, go vent thy rant in woods and wilds.
Such rapture is offensive to my ears.

Mac. And can a brother then refuse me aid?

Her. Thou art not of my blood; allied to me,
Thou wouldst reject all passions, ev'ry thought
Injurious to thy int'rest; worship there,
Let that predominate, make that thy god.
What! sway'd by love! why thou hast friendships too?
Childish and ignorant! Women thou think'st
Have constancy, and men have gratitude.
Vers'd in the world, thou, to thy cost, wilt find
All are betrayers and are all betray'd.

Mac. These grave refinements are not proper now.
Cost what it will, I must possess my love.

Her. What! at expence of pow'r? why Lucifer
Drew half the host of heav'n to espouse his cause,
So tempting is the bait of sov'reign pow'r;
They of ætherial mold. How then should man,
Gross man resist? the ape of angels fall'n.

Mac. There are no joys but in Almira's arms.

Her. Why I love too; for 'tis my interest
To love. I would possess too her I love,
But 'tis to gratify myself. With views
Like these, a wise man may indulge the flame.

Mac. You seek another, yet obstruct my love!

Her. Nature or custom makes me hold thee dear.
Besides, 'tis advantageous to us both
To join in friendship; friendship then may last.

This spreading tree once fill'd, the sickly plant
Depriv'd of air, debarr'd the genial sun,
Recovers strength and shoots into the skies.

Enter Vitiges.

See Vitiges appears——retire a while,
But be at hand, thou too must bear a part. [*Exit Macro.*
While fawning crowds have sung the victor's fame,
[*To Vitiges.*

And scornfully beheld your captive state;
While Cæsar glories in a realm regain'd,
And Belisarius giddy grows with height,
I have retir'd, and mourn'd and wept your fate.

Vit. In courts 'tis rare to meet such gen'rous minds;
Fortune rules there, and guides their love and hate.

Her. Fortune has thrown me in the bustling court,
A place ill suited to so calm a mind,
And full of snares to my incautious steps.
Where base ingratitude has birth, and vile
Dissimulation reigns; where sycophants
Are only held for friends; where lyes prevail
And stifle truth; where momentary shifts
And tricks for wisdom pass, and pride surmounts
And sweeps the palace with her gorgeous train.

Vit. Princes behold their errors in distress,
And like me would reform too late. To me
It matters not how courts are fill'd; but this
I feel, whatever cares attend the prince,
If dispossest'd, he ne'er tastes comfort more.

Her. A helpless, unavailing pity shews
Like pride, and seldom is sincere. Methinks
Pity from my mean state, sounds insolent.
I would be useful, I would serve, assist
So excellent a man, so good a prince.

Vit. Such I was once esteem'd. A captive now,
A slave; and with my pow'r my praise is lost.

Her. And are the appetites to rule destroy'd?
Have you forgot the pleasure of command?
Can you now beg, accustom'd to bestow?

Vit. Why dost thou strive to rowze my drowzy mind,
And bring back hated objects to my eyes?
Why paint the pleasures I can only view,
And why improve the pains I undergo?

I search

I search content in dull forgetfulness,
My mind seeks peace, and memory forbids.

Her. Content! can princes have such narrow views?

What is that thing content? freedom from pain?

To be divested of all appetites?

To have no wish? useless, insipid state!

If to be happy is to be content,

In happiness the dog excells the man,

The worm excells the dog, the block the worm.

Content! a low and lazy excellence,

For drones to exercise in lonely cells;

A stranger to society; in schools

'Tis gravely taught, in practice never found;

In courts, in camps, and at the bar unknown,

By hermits plac'd in solitude; but who

E'er courted solitude, but thro' disgust?

No, give me griefs, anxiety and pain;

For sweetly intermix'd with joy, they give

A poignant relish to my appetite;

Then I luxuriant feast, am rapt in bliss.

What lover is so dull who knows not this?

Why flies th' adulterer the lawful sheets

And courts a brothel love? in hot pursuit

Why is the lion chas'd? caught in the toils

With ease. Why is the noble gen'rous steed

Strain'd to pursue the tim'rous hare? the pains,

The hazards, and the difficulties charm.

And man, shall spritely, sociable man

Confine his wishes to ignoble ease?

Vit. A state my soul disdains; but what redress?

Her. The bold and daring soul ne'er doubts redress,

And rarely fails when prudence is the guide.

Base treachery indeed may interpose

And frustrate both.—Perhaps I may be thought—

Vit. No, thou art honest; thou art sure too wise

To be a knave, too gen'rous to betray.

Her. To see a king in triumph led, in chains,

To feed his conqueror's insolence and pride,

With indignation swells my honest breast.

And here your misery is but begun.

Think what it is to drag, to wear out life,

Meanly dependant on another's smiles.

To court the emp'ror, on his fav'rites fawn,

Subservient to buffoons and parasites.

Vit. It galls, it shocks;—yet Cæsar has declar'd—

Her. Alas! Justinian is not known. 'Tis true
His justice and his temperance are fam'd.
But subtle ministers when they proclaim
The prince's wisdom, but extol their own.
His virtues are but feign'd; inconstant, rash,
Severe and proud, to flatterers a slave.—
But I proceed too far—I am too free——

It is my nature's honest fault——too plain.

Vit. You cannot please me more; I pray proceed.

Her. I meditate a way—would you assist——

Vit. I would be foremost in the brave design.

Her. It may seem strange to scrupulous weak minds,
But what is brave, what wisdom but success?
Rashness and folly barter then their names.
Freedom obtain'd, no matter by what means,
Empire in view, the method is approv'd.

Vit. Too keen my wishes to regain my crown,
Too sensibly I feel my wretched state.
If thou art wise, describe the happy means
To shake off servitude, to mount my throne.
If good, no longer hold me in suspense.

Her. Suppose the fair Almira were bestow'd
On Belisarius, he declar'd your heir.

Vit. I have approv'd, Almira will consent.

Her. With patience hear. Suppose the army too,
Won by his merits, or seduc'd with bribes,
Espous'd their darling's cause; supported thus,
With ease you may reject the Roman yoke,
And Belisarius give Justinian law.

Vit. His faith to Cæsar would transcend his love.

Her. But put the case. What recompence were due,
Were such a deep conspiracy reveal'd?

'Twere justice to restore your conquer'd realms,
And add increase. Justinian could no less,
Nor should I fail to urge his gratitude.

Vit. 'Tis hazardous, 'tis base, beneath a king.

Her. Nay, I advise not. It concerns not me.
I am contented with my humble lot,
In council to preside, and turn and guide
Justinian's will. Howe'er judge of my love,
Which points the way to liberty and pow'r.

And

And would in tenderness to you prevent
Your being crush'd when Belisarius falls.

Vit. You much amaze me; Belisarius fall!

Her. At once he falls, to want, to scorn reduc'd;
I bear the emperor's severe decree.

He vainly thinks, you credulous believe,
His virtues, services, not to be summ'd,
Have fix'd him ever in Justinian's love.

Have you forgot, when subjects grow too great,
Their merits thought beyond all recompence,
That princes either must resign their pow'r,
Or act with base ingratitude. Sad choice.

Such is Justinian's case. He seeks pretence
To justify the ruin he designs.

Vit. Strange! Belisarius sink! his shield! his arm!

Her. It is resolv'd. See where he comes with crowds
Surrounded; false, degen'rate, servile crew!
Mark how the rav'nous herd, lowing for food,
Will shun the waste, and fly the barren land,
And spurn the pasture where they lately fed.
Retire and hear, then judge what course to take. [*Exeunt.*]

Enter Belisarius, follow'd by several Officers.

Bel. You need not, Fulvius, be at farther pains.
Rely on me; this fault shall be forgot;
I know you brave, but learn more temperance.

Ful. May-I but live to shew my gratitude.

Bel. Decius! your courage shewn at Rome besieg'd,
With Rome is recompens'd. You govern Rome.

Dec. Beyond my hopes! accept my humblest thanks.

Bel. You lost your equipage in the late storm,
Murellus! you love show, it suits your youth;
This order will repay your loss tenfold.

Mur. My general's favour is my greatest wealth.

1 *Off.* Excellent man! [*An Officer whispers Belis.*]

2 *Off.* How nobly he bestows!

3 *Off.* He stays not to be ask'd. The manner charms
Beyond the gift.

4 *Off.* How gracefully he moves!

1 *Off.* Has he spoke to you yet?

2 *Off.* No, but he look'd on me and smil'd.

3 *Off.* You are a happy man.
I shall catch his eye presently.

Bel.

Bel Virtuous and fair you say, and nobly born?
And yet your father will not give consent?

Cot. For, she is poor, a helpless orphan left.

Bel. I am her father, I adopt her mine.

I saw thee, Cotta, on Sicilian plains
Do wonders with thy sword. She is my care.
So tell thy father; to endow the maid,
What he demands, I charge myself to pay.

Cot. You give me more than life; not she I love
Can sway me from the gratitude I owe.

1 *Off.* Observe his words, how elegant they flow.

[*Another whispers* Belisarius.

2 *Off.* What fancy in his dress! worn with what ease!

3 *Off.* Hush! he observes—his eyes were turn'd this way.

4 *Off.* Happy the man still present to his sight!

1 *Off.* Might I but live to shew my unfeign'd zeal,
How I adore his worth! I should die pleas'd.

2 *Off.* The virtues of our boasted ancestors
Are all compris'd in him. And when he dies
The Roman glory is expir'd.

3 *Off.* 'Tis true.
To give him life, we all would die.

All. All, all.

4 *Off.* Silence, he speaks.

Bel. And hast thou, Rufus, serv'd,
So many years beneath my banner fought,
And I no better known? Hast thou no way
To feed ambition, or thy avarice;
But to traduce, to carry tales, inform,
And darkly wound the man thou call'st thy friend?
Away—such an offence should be chastis'd—
Yet, for thou hast complain'd of poverty,
Left that should tempt thee to proceed in ill,
This order will enable thee to live.

Enter Hermogenes.

My fellow-soldiers! these are Cæsar's gifts,
From our just emperor these bounties flow.
His coffers when exhausted, what in mine
Remains, freely command. The solid joy
Of wealth and pow'r is in beneficence.

All. Our grateful tongues shall ever sound your praise.

Her. Short praise; or I am much deceiv'd in man. [*Aside.*
Draw

Draw near my friends! You warlike men attend!

While I denounce the emperor's decree,
Aloud and public. So he gives command;

Not but it grieves my soul I should be sent
To damp the joys of this auspicious day,
And clip the victor's large aspiring wings,
Harsh to my tongue: Cæsar must be obey'd.

Bel. If harsh to me, constrain thee not to grieve.
I know thy envious thoughts, thy thankless mind,
To me thou ow'st—but I reproach thee not.
Speak Cæsar's will.

Her. Then know, thou art—undone.
The emperor Justinian has declar'd
From all command, all pow'r thou art dismiss'd.

Bel. May Cæsar live for ever!—yet 'tis strange.

Off. How! what!

Bel. What would my gracious master more?

Her. What the offence I know not, great no doubt,
Or this might well suffice. Sentence is pass'd,
Thy lands, thy goods, all that thou couldst this morn
Call thine, are all confiscated, all seiz'd.

Bel. What, stripp'd of all!

Her. So Cæsar has ordain'd.

And if I can prevail, these worthy men,
These gallant soldiers, they shall share the spoil.

1 *Off.* Most wise Hermogenes!

All. Command our lives.

Her. I can but pity you, and humbly take my leave.

[Exit Her.]

Bel. Insulting man! all seiz'd! displac'd! disgrac'd!

1 *Off.* Well, I always said it would come to this.

2 *Off.* I have foreseen it long, I knew it could not last.

3 *Off.* Last! how should it? ever guided by fools,
A prey to knaves, encompass'd with flatterers,
An honest man cou'd not approach him.

4 *Off.* You know it was always my opinion,
That there was something odd, something melancholick,
Something fatal in his looks.

1 *Off.* How poor a figure now! how mean!

2 *Off.* Did you not observe how handsomly
Hermogenes deliver'd his message,
And how kind to us?

3 *Off.* Oh there's no comparison.
Well, I wish we knew who is to succeed him,

That

That we might be early in paying our compliments.

4 *Off.* Let us enquire. We have no business here.

[*Exeunt Officers.*]

Bel. So soon deserted! what, not one remain!
How quick this storm has blown away these flies!
Why let him seize my palaces, lay waste
My land, and to these wretches give my wealth.
My honesty, my virtue is my own,
Thank heav'n! innate, by practice too confirm'd,
Beyond the reach of wild despotic pow'r.
Is't possible? Valeria! can it be?

Can thy resentment make thee so severe!
And can Justinian yield to my disgrace?

Are all my services forgot? — This morn,
This splendid morn beheld me first of men,
Bless'd and applauded as my chariot drove,
And by my glories Cæsar was obscur'd.
And now, the day not yet consum'd, behold
Me last of men, abandon'd and despis'd!

Oh why is man compos'd of such wild stuff!

Reduc'd at once to beggary! — hard fate!

Who now will ope their hospitable doors,
And shelter Belisarius from the cold?
Who slake his thirst? who spread the friendly board
To give the famish'd Belisarius food,
Or with an Obolus relieve his wants?

And yet, Almira! I repent not love,
For thee I suffer, and for thee will die. —
Alas! to thee I shall grow odious too.
In all my pride of pomp, my glories fresh,
Love found no entrance to thy virgin heart.

Off, off ye faded laurels from my brow!
Ye grievous monitors of what I was.
Away, thou gaudy robe! superfluous load!
Go mix with dirt, encumber me no more!
All ensigns of my short, mock triumph hence!

Enter Almira.

Alm. How swift is fame when she depreciates worth,
Or scornful publishes injurious truths!

Bel. Almira here! now, now receive thy fate!

Alm. Who should precede Almira to condole,
When Belisarius suffers for her sake?

Justinian

BELISARIUS.

25

Justinian loudly has declar'd his wrath,
Neglected love is punish'd with disgrace.

Bel. The blow is sudden; unprepar'd the mind,
Afflictions deeper sink; and yet I could
Collect the man, could bear with fortitude
All ills which malice can invent. But when
I think, how much the distance is increas'd
Between my abject fortune and my love,
How far beneath your smiles, beneath your scorn,
Then to be calm, then to remain unmov'd,
Term it not patience, but the want of love.

Alm. Rouse then ambition, quit this hapless choice;
A fairer love invites thee to her arms,
And with an empire will reward thy flame.
A train of smiling hours invites thy heart,
And thou shalt sleep in peace and wake to joy.

Bel. Be witness heav'n! if I unmanly griev'd,
If one mean thought found entrance in my heart;
Valeria I refuse, if modesty
Allows such speech; Justinian disobey,
And gladly honest poverty embrace.

Why name I these as proofs of faithful love?
My faithful love rejoices at such proofs,
Ambitious to be farther try'd.—Come then
Afflictions come! from out Pandora's box
Pour all your plagues on this devoted head!
Ye reach not my impenetrable heart;
Full of Almira, there ye find no place,
Almira's image bars all entrance there.

Alm. To what sad choice am I compell'd by fate!
He is undone should he resist my prayers,
Should I prevail, Almira! thou art lost.

[*Aside.*]

Consider well thy state; yet be advis'd;
Let reason sway, and let a friend prevail.

Bel. Urge me no more, unless it be to die.

Alm. Yet I must urge, yet dread to overcome.

[*Aside.*]

Art thou resolv'd? let empire, glory, pow'r—

Bel. Vain, vain temptations when compar'd with love.

Alm. Is love so priz'd? take then thy just reward;
Poor recompence, yet all Almira has.

The heart, which fled the happy, wealthy, great,
To thee disgrac'd, abandon'd, friendless, yields.

Bel. Oh sweetest excellence! transporting bliss!
Oh matchless fair! inimitably good!

E

Wonder

Wonder of truth, pattern of gen'rous love!
Hence, the rememb'rance of my injur'd fame,
Of foes triumphant, or of friends ingrate!
To dark oblivion all my cares I drive.

Alm. United hearts, united be our cares,
And be as fam'd for misery as love.

Bel. Glorious resolve! of my first blessing sure,
For thy lov'd sake, Justinian I will sue;
At least he will afford a calm retreat.
There wrapt in love we will forget the world,
Secure in innocence I need not fear,
Nor can his justice bar me such delight.

The sacred oak endures the winter's rage,
Deep are his roots, nor yet impair'd with age.
The storms contemn, resists the angry skies,
And on his honest, conscious strength relies.

[*Exeunt.*]

A C T IV.

The Scene continues.

Enter Justinian and Hermogenes.

Jus. **I**mpious design!

Her. Detestable and base!

Jus. False Belisarius, to thy fame and me.

Her. When false to you, he justly forfeits fame.

Jus. Can man be capable of such deceit?

Her. It much amazes me. All men abhor
To be deceiv'd, yet daily they deceive.
My fault is to be open, too sincere,
My love and hatred known: if I can hate,
If I have enmity, it is to vice.

Jus. I know thee honest, him too I believ'd.

Her. If I am held in doubt, prepare the rack,
Extend each nerve, and burst each swelling vein.
Produce the bull, the vulture, and the wheel,
And try my faith, my constancy in truth.

Jus. I doubt thee not. Yet Belisarius false,
Raises suspicion of the race of man —

So trusted ! so belov'd ! with him I shar'd
The sweets of empire, all the cares my own ;
To him resign'd the reins of government ;
Gave him the pow'r to punish or reward.
And is he false ? and can his looks betray ?
And can his breast conceive ingratitude ?

Her. Incredible indeed ! I should despise
Less proofs ; but Vitiges, the noble Goth,
Charm'd by your goodness, by your virtue aw'd,
Removes the veil, and shews the plot too bare.
'Tis obvious to the sense, beyond all doubt.

Jus. The feign'd displeasure shewn to gratify
Valeria, with the day should have expir'd.
The cloud remov'd, he should have risen next day
Fresh as the morn, and as the sun resplendent.

Her. And it were fit he should. Or could the Goth
Invent this tale, impossible to think.
Why ? to what end ? yet if we could suspect,
Macro, I grieve to say, confirms the whole.

Jus. Valeria should have been pleas'd ; his truth,
His constancy in love, I secret, prais'd,
Tho' un-allied I mark'd him for my heir.

Her. Ambition has no bounds, a vulgar truth.
'Tis tedious to attend ; he aims more near,
Scorns a dependent and incertain state.

Jus. What pity 'tis, how I lament his crime !

Her. Tho' Macro, by confession, merits grace,
He only did not join in the design.

The root strikes deep, the branches are spread wide
My brother caught ! when he has dar'd so far,
Who then has virtue to escape his snares ?
The dire contagion has infected all.

Jus. Mercy would rise, thy justice bears it down.
And much I owe thy diligence and love.
Instruct what's to be done with this *ingrate*.

Her. A smiling traitor, how I hate such men,
So black a crime, no penalty too great.

Jus. I well remember, when but young in arms,
He vanquish'd Perozas, a Persian chief ;
Pleas'd with the news, I swore, rashly it seems,
He should not die thro' me, whate'er his fault.
My oath observ'd, what other punishment
Thy loyal vengeance can invent, inflict.

Her. Mercy by halves ! unsound such politics ;

A thankless boon; or punish or forgive.
 Weigh well his fam'd ability in war,
 His graceful figure, and majestick mien;
 His great alliances, and noble birth;
 Profuse in gifts, compassionate to all,
 Firm to his friend, beneficent to foes,
 Serene his mind, magnificent in life;
 The populace, the soldier, all adore,
 In him the world will grieve. And shall he live?
 Disgrac'd and live? his soul disdains such life:
 Or if preserv'd, 'tis to hatch new designs,
 To call his friends, those virtues to his aid,
 Subvert the state, and give the world a lord.

Jus. Thou shew'st his virtues in so strong a light,
 It staggers and rebates the edge of justice.

He must not die: is there no other way?

Her. Happy the people under such a prince!
 Happy am I, to serve whom mercy sways!
 A heav'nly virtue!—safest in their hands,
 'Tis wisdom there, but folly oft in man—
 You cannot err—there is but one way left—
 My tender nature startles at the deed,

Jus. Name it.

Her. An enterprising soul, nor can
 He wander long with eyes to see his road.

Jus. Hah!

Her. Severe, yet practis'd in the wiser East.
 Nor prisons, dungeons, fetters are secure,
 The ladder oft to reach a higher rank.

Jus. See where he comes. Can treason be so lodg'd?
 The mansion is too noble for the guest.

Her. Serpents and toads lurk under sweetest herbs.
 To give him audience is not safe. You know
 He has a smooth, insinuating tongue.

Enter Belisarius and Proclus.

Bel. I come not to complain of my hard fate,
 Nor grate your ears with services perform'd:
 Such conduct might be term'd an insolence,
 And steel your breast against my last request.

Jus. And what request dost thou presume to make?

Bel. Nor pow'r nor wealth I supplicate. My mind
 Is satiated, and I renounce such toys.

A villa stands on Tyber's fertile banks,
 This morning mine. When Cæsar's wars allow'd
 The sword unactive, then my lov'd retreat;
 There let me indolent consume my days,
 And with Almira bid the world adieu.

Her. Observe the place to which he would retire,
 And with Almira too, ador'd in Rome.
 How every circumstance confirms his guilt! [*To Jus. aside.*]

Jus. There needs no farther proofs.—Soft hypocrite!
 With meekness thou dost hide ambitious thoughts,
 And veil thy stratagems with shew of love.

Bel. Were I ambitious, or base hypocrite,
 I had escap'd the terror of your wrath.

Jus. Traytor no more. Thy plots stand all reveal'd;
 I view thy rebel heart with treason stor'd,
 And vengeance hovers o'er thy guilty head.
 Wait my command, while I decree thy crimes
 Due punishment.—Hermogenes attend. [*Exit Jus. and Her.*]

Bel. What punishment can equal such harsh terms!
 But late, all tongues employ'd to sound my fame,
 All eyes with wonder gaz'd, kings in my train,
 By beauty courted, empire in my choice—
 And now a traitor, hypocrite, ingrate.
 Opprobrious words! most infamous to hear!
 Horror invades me at the sound, my heart
 With indignation swells, and with disdain
 Leaps to my throat and cuts off idle speech.

Pro. From thee, Hermogenes, these mischiefs spring;
 Thou art the soil in which all poys'nous plants
 Luxuriant grow, and nourish'd by thy art
 Bear such pernicious, pestilential fruit.

Bel. Proclus! my friend! for yet a friend is left,
 Partner in war, my counsellor in peace,
 My confidant in love, ever my friend!
 To thee my inmost thoughts were all disclos'd:
 Have I deserv'd indignity like this?
 Am I that thing which scorn forbids repeat?

Pro. It tears, it racks, distracts my soul to hear.

Bel. Nor loss of pow'r, nor pinching want, nor death
 The smaller ill, from it's firm basis moves
 My stable mind. I can acquit me to myself,
 And therefore give myself that peace, the world
 Ingratefully denies. I can look back
 On what I was, I see what now I am,

And

And view with equal eyes my diverse state.
 Yet when experience shews, yet when I know
 What calumny attends a great man's fall,
 How loud she bellows, and how wide she gapes
 To blacken and traduce. What idle tales,
 What incoherent lies, time may transmit
 As truths, to mangle and deface my fame:
 Then fortitude forsakes me, then my griefs
 Want thy support, and call on thee for aid.

Pro. Justinian cannot sure persist in wrong—

Bel. Sudden and violent are his resolves.
 I give myself as lost.—Haste then my friend,
 Fly to Almira, bear her my request,
 Perhaps my last request; entreat the fair
 To ease my sorrows with one parting look;
 Let me but gaze on her, I shall die pleas'd.—
 But haste or I shall never see her more. [*Exit Proclus,*
 Never to see Almira more! hard fate!
 But rav'nous death, that snatches me from love,
 Removes the pains, the mem'ry of such loss.
 Then welcome death.—I shall not wait thee long;
 He comes, he flies, his messenger appears.

Enter Hermogenes with Guards.

I need not ask, I read my fate in thee,
 And thy glad eyes declare I am to die.

Her. Most sure such crimes, such treasons merit death.

Bel. Treasons and crimes! who dare impeach my truth?

Her. Go reason that with Cæsar, he best knows.
 The proofs are plain, demonstrative. However
 His mercy o'er his justice has prevail'd,
 And thou art suffer'd still to crawl on earth.

Bel. Thy abject soul illiterate in good,
 And ignorant of joy, but when the brave,
 The virtuous and the honest man is griev'd;
 Thy gloomy mind could not appear thus gay,
 Were there less punishment decreed than death.

Her. The love of life prevails on any terms;
 If these are harsh, 'tis in thy pow'r to die,
 And by one generous blow dismiss all cares.
 A noble deed! but I give no advice.

Bel. None but what hell suggests to thy dark soul,
 Had I a wish for life, it were to see

Remorse

Remorse and anguish gnaw thy flinty heart;
Earnest of hell.

Her. That thou shalt never see.

Bel. What obstinate, determinate in ill!

Her. Resolv'd to rob thee of that pleasing sight.

Guards! seize your prisoner, lead him hence—away
And execute the emperor's commands.

Bel. Tho' in the jaws of death, tho' in thy pow'r,
The bitter'st curse! my mind sedate and calm,
Impervious by ill, thy wonder shall excite,
And be the object of thy envy still,
And give thee fiercer pains than I endure.
Fortune and thou in vain assault that breast,
Where courage and where innocence reside. [*Bel. is led off.*]

Enter Vitiges.

Vit. I come to claim thy promise; my reward
I seek; make payment quick, my vast reward
For treachery, for perjury, for hell.

Her. To empire turn thy thought; success is sure.

Vit. Mark me for damn'd ingratitude. Each sin
Suffices to impel the reddest bolt
From the just wrath of heav'n.

Her. Why let it fall.

Be resolute; we shall escape the blow.

Vit. Statesman, thou art inur'd to infamy:
Practice has petrify'd thy wicked heart;
Bred to conspiracies, to fawn, betray,
To lie: Yet thou can'st smile! yet thou can'st sleep!
Never shall joy more sparkle in my eyes,
No chearful smile adorn my gloomy face,
No darkness veil the images by day
Impress'd, ghastly and fierce. No drug, no herb,
Intice sweet sleep to silence yelling care.

Her. You are too nice, too delicate of mind;
Would you be great, and scruple you the means?

Vit. I tell thee, politician, that the wounds
Of conscience, by repentance must be heal'd.
Seduc'd by thy enchantments, I have done
A deed, beneath the dignity of kings,
Beneath the dignity of man. Base man!
The only species capable to lie.
Almira weeps for innocence traduc'd,

And

And mourns that Belisarius is displac'd;
 Happy! she knows not of her father's crime.
 Almira's tears have wash'd away thy charm,
 And I behold myself with shame and scorn.

Her. Was it not Belisarius who subdu'd
 The Goths? their name extinguish'd by his sword?
 The poor remains sold slaves? is Vitiges
 A captive, and in scornful triumph led
 To feed his pride and please the hissing crowd?
 And are you grown so abject not to seek
 Revenge, the strongest passion of the mind?

Vit. Not by unworthy means, by thy vile arts.

Her. You urge my temper, sir, too far. Desist,
 Or Cæsar shall be told, nay we will prove,
 If Belisarius is unjustly tax'd,

You were the plotter, you contriv'd the scheme.

Vit. Impute thy crimes to me! can it be thought—

Her. Already perjur'd, you must needs find faith.

Vit. What insolence!

Her. Macro shall justify

What I affirm. You have impos'd on me,
 And drew my easy nature to believe.

Vit. Unheard of villainy! What, to my face!

Her. Come, we have gone too far, now to recede.
 Be calm; I only shew what might be done,
 Far from my honest thoughts. Be rul'd by me,
 And on to-morrow be saluted king.
 But now retire—you must not be seen here.

Vit. Resistless bait! tho' infamous the means,
 We blindly follow or are weakly led,
 So strong the appetites to rule. When will
 To-morrow come!—Could I forget this day!—
 Oh joyful day! tho' I no more a king. [*Exit Vitiges.*]

Her. What terrors has he rais'd! the precipice
 Lay full to sight, tott'ring I stood, nigh fall'n.
 He must not live—I stand on unsure ground,
 Obvious the yawning pitchy gulph—my brain
 Yet dizzy:—Let me fairer prospects view—
 Turn thy pleas'd eyes, on other's ruin feast,
 And sate thy soul with dire revenge.—'Tis done!
 How soon perform'd th' irreparable deed!
 Hah! ghastly sight!—it shocks, it terrifies.—
 Proceed thy joys from thence? is that thy feast?
 He gropes his way—distan'd, dismear'd with blood.

I cannot bear th' approach—'tis death—'tis hell,
'Tis all I dread—'tis less than I deserve—
I shun the fight—Oh could I shun myself! [*Exit Her.*]

Enter Belisarius blind.

Bel. Behold, good heaven! behold my wretched state!
And on triumphant villainy look down!
I call not on revenge; ever awake
Thy justice is, and best knows when to strike.
Equally great, thy mercy I implore
T'endue my mind with light, my eyes have lost,
To know thy wisdom, and revere thy pow'r!

Where am I now? or whither tend my steps?—
No matter where; bold and secure he treads;
Who dares, who wishes to encounter death.
No more the vernal beauties of the fields,
No more the budding honours of the woods
Shall cheer my sight; all lustre lost to me
Obscure and dark; and all is chaos now.

Alas! more piercing ills deface such loss.
Almira! never shall thy beauteous form
Find chearful entrance in these hollow orbs.
Unutterable woe! prone on the earth
Extend this mass of grief—there dig thy grave,
Thy only mansion now.—Almira, oh!

Enter Almira.

Alm. When Belisarius calls, Almira hastes,
With ardor flies to the enchanting voice.—
Stretch'd on the ground! kind heav'n avert my fears!
Are you alive? oh! whence this shew of grief?
Hear, Belisarius, when Almira calls! [*Going to him.*]

Bel. Too sure I live, not yet my sorrows end.

Alm. Alive! and speak! yet turn thy eyes away!

Bel. Alas! I never can behold thee more.

Alm. Not see me more! 'tis thy Almira speaks.

Bel. Thy voice will ever charm, thy sight no more.

Alm. Has then the weight of malice sunk thee down?
And is thy noble heart a prey to care?
No, 'tis Valeria who has wrought this change,
Her charms forbid to view this slighted face,
And wild ambition has engross'd thy heart.

F

Bel.

Bel. Wrong not my honour, nor traduce my love.

Alm. Yes, I am made the sacrifice of peace,
My useless love, my feeble charms contemn'd.
My father's kingdom conquer'd by thy arms,
He and his daughter in proud triumph led,
These wrongs o'ercome, I fondly gave my heart
To thee disgrac'd, abandon'd by thy friends;
Doubly thy captive, now I am despis'd.
But thy feign'd grief, thy conscious shame in vain
Palliate the wrong.—Resentment drives me hence,
Nor will I stay the witness of thy guilt.

[She goes to some distance.]

Bel. Oh stay! and view the cause of my despair!
But first prepare, arm well thy tender mind,
Nor let the dismal spectacle amaze.

Alm. Ah!

[Turning to her, she faints.]

Bel. Well I foresaw, the horror of the sight
Would startle thee. 'Twas therefore I deferr'd.
Now, my Almira! now behold my woe!
Have I not cause? In vain the visual nerves
Are stretch'd to bring thy image to my brain;
Lost to my eyes, fix'd in my heart.—Not speak—
Not answer me—Has horror driv'n thee hence!—
And art thou fled?—Forfaken too by thee!
Merciless death! do'st thou avoid me too?
Proclus! Almira! death! heav'n! all, all deaf?

Enter Proclus.

Pro. Sure 'twas his voice! Almira on the earth!

[As he advances towards her, he sees Belisarius.]

What, Belisarius too! What can this mean?
Both claim my aid—Friendship be first obey'd.
My noble friend!

Bel. Go seek Almira out.
Useless thy care of me.—Go search my love;
Bring, bring her here.

Pro. Behold! turn there thy eyes.

Bel. Mock not my griefs—Proclus! view thou thy friend.

Pro. Oh horror! horror!

Bel. Hush thy vain complaints!

Pro. Oh damn'd detested deed!

Bel. Where is my love?

Pro. Oh miserable sight! villains! hell! hell!

Torn

Torn out thy eyes!

Bel. Away, Almira seek—

Pro. Transported by her grief, she fainting lies—

Bel. Quick, quick, my friend, lead, guide me to the fair— [Rising.

Be thou my fight—let me have one embrace,
And prostrate at her feet, forget my wrongs.

'Tis my Almira! 'tis my tender love!

I need not eyes to know, my heart directs.

Pro. She breathes, she stirs.

Bel. Gently the angel raise.

Oh give her to my arms! recline on me,

Thou heav'nly recompence of mortal cares!

Pro. Rage shakes this frame, and grief dissolves my heart.

Hurry'd by rage, due vengeance I would claim.

Nor kings should bar, nor altars should protect.

Enervated by grief, I bend to earth.

Nor can remove me from the woeful fight.

Oh fight! infusing horror and despair?

Oh Niobe! thy eligible doom!

Better a stone than reasoning wretched man.

Bel. Awake my love? oh, bless me with thy voice!

Alm. Oh leave me in this soft forgetful state!

Bel. Bless'd be the sound! live, my Almira, live!

And on less frightful objects turn thy eyes.

Alm. Where shall I turn my streaming eyes? the world

Affords no other object worthy fight.—

Oh woeful fight! that blasts my vernal hopes,

Freezes my blood, and withers all my joys.

Bel. Approach ye envious, ye detractors, come,

Ye who malign'd my pow'r, my fame in arms,

These mournful accents hear! Almira view!

And see me triumph in her piteous tears!

Now swell with rage, behold a richer prize,

A nobler conquest than my sword e'er won!

Alm. Thy loss, thy pains inflame my grateful breast,

And I grow more enamour'd by thy wrongs.

I am the wretched cause of this curs'd deed;

Shall I refrain from gazing then on thee?

On thee, the object still of my desires?

No, be their malice scorn'd, their pow'r defy'd,

Nor shall their pow'r deter, nor modesty

Dissuade my flying to thy arms for peace, for joy.

Bel. My life! my soul! all that is dear on earth!

So wholly are my thoughts on thee employ'd,
 Feeling so quicken'd by the loss of fight,
 So strong thy lov'd idea on my mind
 Impress'd, methinks I gaze upon thee still:
 Still view the lilies on thy face and breasts,
 The blushing roses on thy lips and cheeks,
 And I but close my sight as when beheld
 The dazzling rays shot from thy heav'nly eyes,
 And still my soul with former joys is fill'd.

Alm. Yet it is sad; is it not gracious heav'n?
 Oh ease his pains!—and is there no redress?
 Oh I would lend one light! oh both bestow!

Bel. I can forget my pains, neglect my eyes—
 What's pain or loss of eyes to this embrace?

Pro. Send from thy three divisions, send, thou globe,
 Innumerable hosts to mourn his wrongs!
 Yawn wide thou earth! ye fiends come dancing forth,
 And see yourselves outdone by mortal spite!
 Awhile forget your torments and rejoice
 That virtue suffers and that vice prevails.

Alm. Oh! you indulgent pow'rs! whence mercy flows,
 Oh grant us patience to support these woes!

Pro. Is it a virtue to be patient now,
 When virtue is thus impiously oppress'd?
 Patience and caution are the false pretence
 Of slaves and cowards to submit to wrongs.
 Revenge, revenge alone is worth my care.
 Dire goddesses come! and with thy hundred whips
 Aid my pursuit, and lash the slave to hell,
 The base detested author of these wrongs.

Bel. Complaints are vain, and keep our griefs awake.
 Leave to unerring heav'n to punish crimes.

But guide me, o ye faithful virtuous pair!
 Conduct my feeble steps, from hence remove,
 From courts, from crowds, to friendship and to love.
 This comfort still remains, to charm my mind,
 One friend is faithful, and Almira kind. [Exeunt.

A C T V.

The Scene continues.

Enter Hermogenes and Macro.

Mac. I Met him at the gate, by Proclus led,
Led by Almira; tis a dismal sight.

Her. Oh never, never will it fly my mind.
Spectres nor fiends could terrify so much.

Mac. Was there no other way? best to have dy'd.

Her. I could not win the emperor's consent,
Cruel his mercies are. He bound himself
He said by vows, by oaths; trifling pretence!

Mac. Should Cæsar see, his anger must abate.

Her. Macro, 'tis true; consult our safety we.
Suspend these thoughts a while; leave to lament,
And let yet greater crimes this crime defend.
Repentance and compassion will arise
In Cæsar's wavering breast, unless he views
Some fresh conspiracy design'd. Beside,
Valeria may be justly fear'd; her love
Again surmounts her wrath. The rabble too
This morn enroll'd him with the gods: at noon
With taunts and hisses they pursu'd his steps;
And ere 'tis night, in their tumultuous rage
With equal justice they will sacrifice
His foes, and him will deify again.

Mac. Whate'er we do, we soon must execute.

Her. Nor are we safe, should Vitiges survive;
Already he repents, and wildly talks
Of wounded conscience, and of injur'd fame.
He must be soon dispatch'd.

Mac. What's to be done? —

The rabble are enrag'd, and bellow loud;
Their nest's disturb'd, the hornets swarm abroad,
And buz and rage t'enfix their deadly stings.

Her. Mix with our friends among the sordid crowd;
There loudly Belisarius praise, extol
His fame, and dwell pathetic on his wrongs.
Let justice be their cry, they love the sound.
Then head our mercenary troops; and death
Secure thou may'st inflict on those we dread,

When

When friends and foes confus'dly intermix.
 Pretending aid to Cæsar, Cæsar's friends
 Destroy.—Be gone, for see Valeria comes. [*Exit Macro.*]

Enter Valeria.

Val. Where is this traitor? this inhuman wretch?
 And art thou found? and dar'st thou stand my rage?

Her. Have I offended? witness gracious heaven!—

Val. Dost thou appeal to heav'n? impiety!
 'Tis blasphemy in thy apostate mouth
 But to pronounce that sacred name. Invoke
 Thy hell, thy black original, from whence
 Such cruelty, such malice could proceed,

Her. What have I done?

Val. The insolent demand!
 On Belisarius think, think on his wrongs;
 Then ask thy self, then dare to think of heav'n.
 Thy malice has involv'd me in thy guilt,
 Made me participate thy horrid crimes.
 Could'st thou believe? Oh providence how just!
 The wicked of their prudence to divest,
 And folly give for guide, when impiously
 They deviate from thy laws.

Could'st thou suppose
 If I had interest, if I had pow'r
 To work the emperor, by a sister's pray'rs,
 To counterfeit displeasure, and displace
 The justest, bravest, worthiest of mankind;
 Could'st thou, the basest, falsest, be so vain
 To hope escape? or say I slept, or were
 Too weak to punish, is not heav'n awake?

Her. Their faithful servants princes thus reward;
 The tax we pay for delegated pow'r.
 If with sinister look fortune regards
 Our toil, the shame and the disgrace is ours,
 Tho' wisdom did direct. If they succeed
 Thro' us, the profit and the honour theirs.

Kal. No, monster, no. Such ministers as thou
 Never give council but to selfish ends.
 Ambition, avarice, envy, and revenge
 Engross your thoughts; and never are pursu'd
 Your prince's honour, or your country's good,
 By low submission, and by servile arts

Yet

Ye mount the battlements of pow'r; and strait
The scaffold undermine by which ye rose,
By base degrees ascend; the topmost round
Obtain'd, the prince with envy ye behold,
Trace out unpopular, offensive rules,
Then meanly quit, his sinking cause desert,
And to the next invader pay your vows.

Her. Such music ever dwells upon your tongue,
Th' attention charm'd, I could with pleasure hear
Th' harmonious sound, should you pronounce my death.

Val. Low flatterer! ill-judging sycophant!
Is this a time to sooth by fulsome praise?

Her. Am I to blame? 'twas Cæsar gave command.
When discontents prevail, the minister
Is safely tax'd, but pow'r supreme is meant.
'Twas Cæsar's will, the empire's safety urg'd.—

Val. Cæsar shall know—and opportune he comes,
To hear thee shuffle off thy sins on him.

Enter Justinian.

Approach, misguided prince! behold the slave
Who first seduc'd me, credulous and fond
To wrong the best of men, a moment's wrong!
Whose impious council hath procur'd a deed
Cruel and rash, pernicious to thy fame,
And ever to thy justice a reproach.
And now he dares plead innocence, and now
Thy rashness, my credulity is blam'd,

Jus. I know the cause, and I approve of grief
So just; 'twas too severe; would it could be
Recall'd. I feel with him, I mourn with thee.

Val. Ease then thy mind, expiate in part thy guilt.
Let his devoted head atone for crimes,
Which his inveterate malice could invent.

Jus. And yet I was unwillingly induc'd,
Sigh'd for his guilt, and mourn'd his dark designs.

Val. His guilt, and his designs!

Jus. Too evident.

Unworthy were my hands to hold the scales
Of dread impartial justice, were the weights
Unequal, or his merits not allow'd
Their full extent. My peace, that I forgive,
The empire's safety claim'd this sacrifice.

Her.

Her. Necessity compell'd.

Val. Traytor be dumb.

Your peace, the safety of the empire urg'd!
Of Belisarius do you speak?

Jus. Of him.

And would to heav'n I could retrieve his guilt
And punishment, with half my loss of empire!
So much he was esteem'd, so well belov'd.
Flagrant the proofs, else I were most accus'd.
He had conspir'd against my dignity,
Seduc'd the army to espouse his cause;
And, aided by the Goths, he would reject
My power, and a new empire raise in Rome.
Macro, repenting Macro, has confess'd.

Val. Is that a proof? Oh imposition gross,
Absurd! forgive me Sir! you bade me love,
And must allow my rage. Are you to learn,
Dull Macro is his wicked instrument, [*Pointing to Her.*
The tool, the echo, of this hypocrite?

Jus. When you have heard, then censure will be mute:
To Belisarius' sword much praise is due,
But wisdom is more prevalent than arms.
Had not this faithful servant interven'd
With wise advice, conquests were vain to me.
Two witnesses our law demands; and two
Appear'd, in every circumstance agreed.
Macro confess'd, and Vitiges confirm'd.

Val. Credit his foe! 'tis malice, 'tis revenge.

Jus. Behold he comes, now be your self the judge.

Enter Vitiges, leaning on his Sword.

How's this? wounded he seems, and weakly moves.

Her. Confusion! yet alive! Macro has fail'd,
He kills by halves, but I shall perish whole.

Vit. Flow not so fast my blood! breathe yet ye lungs!
Lend strength good heaven! support my feeble limbs!
Prolong my life! till I reveal my shame.

Jus. I grieve to see your wounds; from whence this
chance?

Vit. No chance; from Macro's hands these wounds proceed,
To stifle truth; lest honour not extinct
Should prompt me to disclose our treachery,
Our falsehood by Hermogenes contriv'd.

Jus.

Jus. Your accusation false!

Vit. False, groundless, base.

Jus. Oh ye just pow'rs! what has my rashness done?

Vit. What has ambition done? flatter'd, betray'd?

Val. Oh Belisarius! well I knew thy worth.

Vit. Oh name him not, his innocence, like heav'n,

Glares on my sins, and, with distracted sight,

I view the hell I merit ere I die —

I view it there — 'tis painted in that face —

It is it's monarch — let us speed him there —

Thus devil to thy own dominion haste. —

[*Vitiges offers to run at Hermogenes, and falls.*

Let him not escape. — Witness I repent —

And Belisarius — daughter — oh forgive.

[*Dies.*

Jus. And art thou yet alive? detested slave!

Infernal dog! can'st thou support the light?

Her. Your anger is more terrible than death.

Zeal to engross your love inspir'd those crimes,

And if contrition for those crimes might hope —

Jus. Presumptuous villain! what! and dar'st thou hope?

Despair and die. If mercy thou wouldst seek,

Let Belisarius start before thy eyes

And cut off utterance. — I heard the wretch

Artfully turn his virtues into crimes,

Yet I was to those virtues deaf. The bull

Thou did'st invoke, the vulture and the wheel;

Oh I could curse myself, not to suspect

Unnecessary vows of innocence;

Be they thy endless lot! — monster, be gone,

Precipitate to hell, region of woe!

Guards! seize the slave. — take, drag him hence to death.

[*Hermogenes is carry'd off.*

Val. That the foul rust of scandal is remov'd,

That innocence appears in bright array

Is some alloy to grief. Let us rejoice

That Belisarius yet survives, tho' blind.

Employ your thoughts to recompense his wrongs,

And sweeten life with joys he yet can taste.

I yield not to despair, since yet he lives.

Enter Proclus.

Jus. Grant him to live, good heav'n! prolong his days!

That he may find how truly I repent.

G

Proclus!

Proclus ! most welcome ! to my wish arriv'd,
To witness how I mourn thy injur'd friend.

Pro. Injur'd indeed ! dead Macro hath confess'd
The black conspiracy.

Jus. Is he then dead ?

Pro. This sword extorted truth before he dy'd.
That curs'd Hermogenes contriv'd the plot
By which my friend is lost. And on pretence
That Belisarius' wrongs might be redress'd,
Macro intic'd the populace to rise.
All were amaz'd, confus'd. He led a band
Of ruffians, proper instruments of death,
With popular and feign'd acclame, he cry'd,
Let Cæsar live ! down with his foes—and then ——
Oh grief to tell !

Jus. This Vitiges declar'd.
See where he lies, cut off by Macro's sword.

Pro. Happy ! he is exempt from farther cares,
The chaste Almira's wounds not move thee now.

Jus. Her wounds !

Pro. Eager and covetous of death,
Among the heedless swords she ran, she flew,
Distracted at the sight, oh horrid sight !

Jus. More woe !

Pro. Macro pretending to suppress
The rage his arts contriv'd, while on my arm
Great Belisarius lean'd—the traitor's sword—
Oh that I live to tell—my friend ! my friend !
Thy bosom pierc'd.

Val. Oh that I live to hear !
Oh that thy fate, Almira ! had been mine !
Would I had dy'd like thee, o envy'd maid !
Envy'd in life, and envy'd more in death !

Jus. Sorrow and shame and guilt tie up my tongue.

Val. Love wounds more deep, love more distracts than
these.

Neglected love enrag'd my haughty soul.
Presumptuous, I defy'd a greater curse.
Who knows the worst ? Oh who can tell how deep
The wrath of heav'n can pierce, how far afflict ?
Thee, hero, thee ! whose suff'rings who can tell ?
Thee I would now resign, and think me bless'd
On any terms to rescue thee from death.

Pro. Revenge, confusion, horror, and despair

Seiz'd

Seiz'd ev'ry heart, appear'd in ev'ry face.
 He only unconcern'd. Proclus ! he cry'd,
 'Tis done, my sorrows cease, here end my cares.
 While life remains, see me with speed convey'd
 To Cæsar, to attest my innocence,
 My honour this demands. He could no more ;
 For now he learn'd Almira's fate. Then, then
 His courage fail'd, proof to all other ills.
 Oh dismal deed ! oh spectacle of woe !
 The noble virtuous pair, weltring in blood !
 Oh dismal accents ! oh ye gen'rous breasts !
 Each mourn'd the other's lamentable fate,
 Each in their own rejoyc'd. Forgive my tears !
 I cannot, need not speak. — Behold them brought !

Val. Horror to sight ! oh torture to my mind !
 Worse, worse than death ! I live and see
 Thee die — and folded in another's arms.
 Now jealousy returns, jealousy in death.
 What num'rous griefs distract my crowded brain !
 Fly the sad sight ! — Oh can I fly my thoughts !
 The racking thought, that I began thy woes. —
 But fly the sight — go waste thy tedious life
 In gloomy grottos and in dreary cells.
 Incessant there, thy guilt his fate deplore,
 Nor man, nor sun, shall ever view thee more. [*Exit Val.*]

Belisarius and Almira are led in supported, and leaning on each other, then placed in chairs.

Alm. My strength declines apace. I sink, I faint.

Bel. Oh stay ! Almira ! leave me not behind.

Jus. Oh Belisarius ! could I tell my grief,
 Could I display the anguish of my soul,
 Thy mercy would look gently on my faults,
 And pity would inspire thee to forgive.

Bel. Then I die pleas'd, no more remains to ask,
 My loyalty, my honour, justify'd.

Jus. Nor day, nor hour shall pass, wherein thy praise
 Shall not be loudly sung, my rashness mourn'd,

Bel. May you live happy ! I shall soon find peace.
 But where's my love ? — Almira ! yet alive !

Oh guide my wand'ring feeble arms to heav'n !
 Yet art thou warm my fair ? yet beats thy heart ?

Alm. To thee it beats and flutters at thy touch.

On

On thee depends its strength, by thee I breathe.
 Insensible of pain, thoughtless of death,
 When I can clasp, when I can press thee here,
 When I can hang my drooping head on thee.
 But now I faint, for thou alas! grow'st cold.

Bel. Life on the wing, thy voice delays her flight.
 For her immortal voyage prun'd, thou call'st
 My soul to earth. Nor is my heav'n delay'd,
 When with Almira join'd; I have it here,
 And in thy arms anticipate my joys.

Pro. I have no friendship, I am form'd of steel,
 Or grief and pity would dissolve this heart.

Alm. Or do my eyes deceive me? grow they dim?
 Or am I wild and fanciful in death?
 Instruct me some; view I my father there?

Pro. Too true, by the same villainy destroy'd.

Alm. The little that remain'd of life, that fight
 Exhausts.—I dy'd too slow—father!—I come.
 Death has less terror now—'tis sweet—'tis kind.—
 Oh Belisarius haste—Oh gracious heav'n— [Dies.]

Bel. Peace to thy soul!—observant of thy call—
 I follow thee—to heav'n—oh may I find— [Dies.]

Pro. He's gone, he's gone; virtue is fled the world.

Jus. Thou best of men farewell! Proclus, to thee
 My sorrow shall be seen, constant, sincere,
 Till in thy lost friend's name thou shalt forgive.
 Succeed him in command and in my love,
 Small recompence, well weigh'd, for such a loss.

And let my rashness like a beacon blaze
 To warn all others from the fatal shelve.
 Henceforth let none invidious tales regard,
 And never censure, nor condemn unheard. [Exeunt omnes.]

4 AP. 54

F I N I S.